

Bang-go the quango?

The National Policing Improvement Agency will be under scrutiny as part of moves by the new Conservative government to put quangos under the spotlight for potential cuts.

Russ Watson, chairman of Northumbria Police Federation, asked police minister Nick Herbert whether the NPIA is a 'luxury we can no longer afford as a service' during economic hard times.

Mr Herbert said that before the general election Prime Minister David Cameron had already stated that he would be reviewing every quango in existence.

The police minister warned that bodies like the NPIA would be under scrutiny and if they were not found to be performing then 'they are going to go'. He added that they were reviewing the NPIA and what it is doing 'as we are all aspects of policing as savings have to be made'.

He told delegates at the Police Federation's Conference: "We want to get the money to where we want it - which is to frontline policing."

But Nick Gargon, deputy chief constable and chief operating officer of policing policy and practice at the NPIA, said they would have to look through budgets 'line by line'. "We accept that the cuts are going to be bad but we would like to know quickly how bad."

He added that they are already cutting a fifth of all managers within the NPIA over the next few years and if they found things in their budget which could not be afforded then they would have 'to stop doing it' but it could mean some difficult decisions.

He said that the Airwave radio system, a project overseen by the NPIA, cost millions each year but if it was switched off there would be 'dire consequences'.

Mark Rowley, chief constable of Surrey Police, added to the debate saying that if budgets were cut severely, estimated at 20 per cent, then there is 'no way we can deliver what we do'.

The big freeze

Constables' leader Paul Lewis vowed to fight any deterioration in pay and conditions for police officers as a pay freeze could be on the horizon for those in the public sector.

Police minister Nick Herbert told the Federation's Constables' Central Committee conference that the government are in discussions about a pay freeze for those earning £18,000 or more a year.

But added: "We cannot allow the poorest paid in our society to pay the price for this [recession and budget deficit] but that is the situation we have to deal with."

He added they had been in discussions about a pay freeze in the public sector but that this would have to be decided by a coalition government but that the biggest focus would be on wasteful public spending and cutting bureaucracy, including looking at the role of 'police quangos'.

But Mr Lewis told delegates during his keynote speech that they would not accept reduced officer numbers; a reduced service to and for our communities or a deterioration in terms and conditions of service.

Speaking at the Police Federation's annual conference in Bournemouth, he said: "These are our principles. These are the values that we shall not compromise. We must oppose modernisation when it is used against us, when it erodes our professionalism, undermines our dignity and puts a crude price on what we value. That we must oppose."

An officer from Greater Manchester Police asked that the police minister look at the Crown Prosecution Service, saying that police officers ended up preparing prosecution files that had no chance of the offender being charged. He called for custody sergeants to be given back the power to make commonsense decisions in such cases.

Mr Herbert said: "We want to give professionals more responsibility and reduce the burden of bureaucracy on them."

Nick Herbert: quangos will go if they are not performing



Paul Lewis: cutting officer numbers would reduce service to public

